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## **Area lawmakers investigate grape loss in Southwest Michigan**

**LANSING** – Area lawmakers toured Berrien County grape farms today to see first hand the damage done to the crops from the recent freeze. The visit was an effort to provide some financial relief to local grape growers and assess the impact on related industries and the tourism industry.

Sen. Ron Jelinek, Reps. John Proos and Neal Nitz, along with Department of Agriculture Director Mitch Irwin and Rhonda Siebenmark from Congressman Fred Upton's office met with a dozen area grape growers to evaluate the situation.

"The damage is quite severe to the grapes and potentially to other fruits as well," said Jelinek, R-Three Oaks. "We don't know the full extent yet and it will be a couple more weeks before we know the full impact. What we do know is that the farmers already have invested lots of money in these crops, so they are in a hard spot right now. If there's any kind of relief we can give them from the state or federal government we need to do it."

The recent frost in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties damaged between 90 to 100 percent of the grape crops.

"Grape growers are a major part of the economic engine that drives Michigan's great Southwest," said Proos, R-St. Joseph. "We don't yet know what the economic impact will be after roughly 90 percent of the grape crop was damaged. Senator Jelinek, Rep. Nitz and I stand ready to assist where we can to help combat this terrible loss."

Also on hand today were Ron Nelson and Ken Nye from Farm Bureau, John Jasper and Terry Holloway from the National Grape Cooperative, representatives from Welch's Growers, and Carl Kincaid from Greenstone Farm Credit Services.

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